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Old Wells and Water= Courses of the Island of Manhattan

By
Geo. Everett Hill
and
Geo. E. Waring, Jr.

PART I

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OLD WELLS AND WATER-COURSES

OF THE

ISLAND OF MANHATTAN.

BY GEO. EVERETT HILL AND GEO. E. WARING, JR.

PART I.

THE Reverend James Wolley, Chaplain of the British soldiery in New York under Sir Edmund Andros,—but much better known to us in his sporting capacity, as hero of the famous bear hunt in John Robinson's orchard on Maiden Lane,—published, when he returned to England in 1681, *A Two Years' Journal of New York*, in which he set forth, in quaintly pedantic phrase, the charms of the Island of Manhattan. In the estimation of this clerical Nimrod, not the least of the blessings enjoyed by the desirable region was the goodly provision under which "Nature kindly drains and purgeth it by Fontanelles and Issues of run-

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General
Original
Topogra=
phy

ning waters in its irriguous Valleys." We read with approval ; for the springs and streams of the land of the Manhatoes were remarkable for their number, their diverse characteristics and—considering the limited drainage area of each—for their size.

But we open our eyes in mild astonishment when the worthy clergyman describes this paradise as "free from those Annoyances which are commonly ascribed by naturalists for the Insalubriety of any Country, viz. South or Southeast Winds, stagnant Waters, lowness of Shoars and"—but enough ! Surely the reverend gentleman had land to sell, probably in Beekman's Swamp ! For, apart from the remarkable constancy which he ascribes to the fickle breezes (which alone are responsible for the behavior of the notoriously fickle weathercock), we know that there was but little elevated ground to be found in the ordinary peregrinations of the citizen of that day, and that the shores were deeply indented with frequent marshy inlets and salt meadows ; while a continuous swamp extended from river to river, separating the lower part of the island from the higher land above, and spreading out on its western edge into an extensive morass, long famous for its malaria and mosquitoes.

Above this swamp an irregular range of sand hills marked the beginning of better

ground, well elevated, well drained and, for the most part, of fairly uniform grade. Save for an extensive marsh on the east side, these conditions prevailed to the upper border of the lower third of the island. Then the formation gradually became rugged and irregular, the sandy and gravelly soil disappearing, and rock predominating more and more as the elevation increased. Several streams of considerable size traversed this district, running through stony valleys flanked by high rocky hills. On the western side, this bold formation continued to the northerly boundary ; but toward the east, at a point distant from the end by about one fifth of the total length of the island, the rugged, rocky character terminated abruptly, and the fertile plains and meadows of Harlem began.

Such, in brief, was the general topographical condition of the island when the early Dutch colonists founded New Amsterdam.

The site for the town was not determined without discussion. Some of the party urged that the settlement be made on the main land, just above the Spuyten Duyvis Creek, ostensibly because it was a secluded place, which would be likely to escape observation and attack ; but it is safe to say that they were attracted, to a greater or less degree, by the low fertile plains, intersected with streams and tidal inlets, which resembled their native land

Choice of
Location
for Set-
tlement

De Heere
Gracht

and which invited the construction of canals. For a Dutchman without a canal was like gingerbread without ginger,—a possibility, it is true, but an anomaly ; a fit object for pity or contempt, according to circumstances.

Fortunately for their successors, an inlet of the bay, which could be made to do duty as a canal, extended inland for about a quarter of a mile on the line of the present Broad Street. This ditch was the natural outlet for a marshy section of considerable size lying above what soon came to be known as The Beaver Path, now Beaver Street. A brook trickled through this marsh, from the common lying north of it, called the *Shaape Waytie*, or Sheep Pasture, and received the flow of a small stream which ran through the Company's Valley, as that portion of The Beaver Path was named which lay between Heere Straat (Broadway) and the junction of these two rivulets. From the latter point, the Heere Gracht—or Heere Graft as it was soon called, stretched its odorous length to the bay.

Around this ditch gathered much of the social and business life of the new community. The first church, commenced in 1633, was erected within a stone's throw of its banks, and occupied as a place of worship until Dominie Bogardus, and the after-dinner subscriptions of the guests at his stepdaughter's wedding, built the new church within the fort.

Just beside the church was the Company's bakery ; and just behind the church, on Brugh Straat, was the Company's brewery ; while half-way between the church and the brewery was the house of the preacher himself. Alas ! if reports be true, the Dominie's tastes and habits coincided exactly with his geographical position.

The New
Church
and the
Brewery

Several foot-bridges were built across De Heere Graft, and a wider bridge, "for cattell and waggons," spanned it at Hoogh Straat. Its banks became the public market of the town. Several times was it deepened and otherwise improved. In 1657, it was determined to line the banks of the ditch with plank, and to assess the cost upon the owners of the abutting property. This called forth a storm of indignation from the luckless proprietors, who, with the same breath, declared that the proposed change was useless, extravagant, and undesirable, and that it would be of great benefit to the public at large and therefore should be made at the expense of the town. Governor Stuyvesant, regardless of their threats and petitions, ordered the execution of the project. The work proceeded and was finished in 1659, at a cost of about one thousand dollars. The width of the amended canal was sixteen feet, and the roadway on each side of it was twenty-eight feet wide, making the total width seventy-two

Broad
Street
and the
Canal

feet, the present average of the street. Some of the property-owners refused to pay their assessments, but the testy old Governor, who more than made up in determination what he lacked in legs, ordered the delinquents to be locked up until they should come to his way of thinking. Before nightfall, all had experienced a change of heart and avowed their willingness to pay.

A similar improvement was made to the ditch above The Beaver Path, which afterwards became known as the Prince Graft, the centre of the tanning and shoemaking business. In 1676, however, this industry removed to Maiden Lane, and, a little later, to Beekman's Swamp.

De Heere Graft had now become a desirable residential quarter, and many of the better class of citizens had made their homes upon its well-paved banks. For some time, the merchants of the town had met at the Hoogh Straat bridge for the transaction of business, and in March, 1670, the first New York Exchange was established, which held weekly meetings on Fridays, between eleven and twelve o'clock. In the winter, the boys of the town improved so well the coasting facilities afforded by the hill from Broadway to the bridge, that the merchants were obliged to ask for protection, and Governor Lovelace ordered the Mayor to see that the annoyance was stopped.

In 1671, further repairs to the big ditch were made, mainly upon the lines adopted in 1657; but in 1676, *horribile dictu*, the edict went forth that the precious canal must be made way with, and the inhabitants were ordered to cover it and fill it up level with the street. One naturally expects the records to tell of violent protest against this assault upon ancient traditions ; but the Dutch spirit had declined and we hear not a murmur of remonstrance. Indeed, so complete from the first was the submission to the English rule, that within three months after the capitulation of Governor Stuyvesant, the Dutch magistrates of the town, in a petition addressed to the Duke of York, expressed great satisfaction with “ the Hon’ble Col. Richard Nichols,” and stated that they were “ confident and assured that, under the wings of this valiant gentleman, we shall bloom and grow like the cedar on Lebanon.”

So De Heere Graft was buried and its place became Broad Street. At this time the Wet Docks were built, at the foot of the street,—two great basins, sufficiently large to accommodate a whole fleet of the ships of that day, and intended to afford facilities for the rapid loading and unloading of cargoes. This improvement stimulated markedly the price of real estate in that vicinity, and brought to Broad Street even more trade than it formerly enjoyed.

New
Canal
Sup=
pressed

**The
Broad
Street
Sewer**

Under the street, the canal, turned into a sewer, still serves as outlet for the drainage of about thirty-eight acres of closely built territory; and the extensive systems of piling, needed to support heavy buildings on the site of the old swamp, still call to mind the original condition of the ground.

Prior to 1677, the only public source of water supply was a well and pump close to the gate of the fort. In that year, however, Stephen Van Cortlandt was appointed Mayor, under Governor Andros, and, by his direction, the first public wells of the city were dug. There were six of these, and each was located in the middle of a street. Between this date and 1700, four other public wells were dug, similarly situated, making ten in all. Of these wells, seven are known by name, and the sites of the other three have been established beyond doubt. They were located thus:—
“De Riemer’s Well,” in Whitehall Street, near Bridge; “Well of William Cox,” near the Stadt Huys, at the head of Coenties Slip; “Ten Eyck and Vincent’s Well,” in Broad Street, between Stone and South William; “Tunis De Kay’s Well,” in Broad Street, a little above Beaver; “Frederick Wessel’s Well,” in Wall Street, west of William; “Mr. Rombout’s Well,” in Broadway, near Exchange Place; and the “Well of Suert Ol-

Old Wells and Water-Courses

311

pherts," in the same neighborhood. Of the three which are not known by name, two were in Broad Street, near Exchange Place, and the third was in Wall Street, between Broad and New Streets. The water from these wells was brackish and the supply was not plentiful; but they were regarded as an important addition to the resources of the fire department, and valued for this, if for nothing more.

Many other wells were dug in the lower part of the city in after years, but the records concerning them are often vague and confusing. We know of one at Church and Cedar Streets, and of another at Dey and Greenwich Streets; also of one seventy-two feet deep in Washington Market, which yielded very poor water.

In a depression which followed the line of the present Maiden Lane from Nassau Street to the East River, a little stream of sparkling spring water rippled and danced over a pebbly bottom. The southerly bank was steep, but not abrupt, while, on the north, a gentle grassy slope extended from the water to a sharper rise just beyond. This spot presented such facilities for the washing and bleaching of linen that it became a resort for laundry women, and because of this it was first called *Maagde Paetje*, or Virgins' Path.

*Maagde
Paetje
Laundry*

The
V'lei

At the foot of this valley, the Brooklyn ferry-boats discharged their passengers and cargoes ; and an enterprising blacksmith, named Cornelius Clopper, established himself on the corner of Pearl Street and Maiden Lane, where he speedily built up a considerable business with the Long Island farmers and traders. Before long his sterner industry completely overshadowed the gentler domestic toil of the washing women, and the Maidens' Lane became the Smith's Valley, or Smit's V'lei. This was afterwards shortened into The V'lei, and then corrupted to Fly ; so that when the first public market-sheds were erected, on land reclaimed from a little tract of salt marsh at the mouth of this stream, they were popularly called the Fly Market.

Close by the ferry stairs lived Philip Livingston, dealer in rum and grindstones, glass and furs, hardware and marble,—an active politician and a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

To this valley the tan-yards removed, when they were banished from the Prince Graft, and from here they went to Beekman's Swamp, or to the Fresh Water Pond. Gradually the hills were levelled and the brook was filled. Although the surface still exhibits a marked depression, there is little to indicate the conditions from which Maiden Lane received its name.

Peck Slip marks the entrance to what was another marshy district, extending in the shape of an irregular lozenge from the shore (then at Water Street) to what is now the corner of Frankfort and North William Streets; and with its minor axis running from the present intersection of Beekman and Gold Streets to Brooklyn Bridge at Vandewater Street. The centre of this district, bounded now by Cliff, Frankfort, and Gold Streets, and a southeasterly projection of Spruce Street, was so low as to be in a state of almost continual submersion; while the slightly higher marshy shores were covered with a thick growth of brambles, which gained for the locality the name of Kripple-bush, or tangled briers. The earliest buildings in the vicinity were the storehouses of Isaac Allerton, merchant, which, in 1661, stood on the shore close by, when there were but twelve buildings in all outside of the stockade on Wall Street.

This land was part of a farm owned by Thomas Hall, who, in 1670, sold it to William Beekman. The new owner planted an orchard upon the hill-side running down to the marshy valley, and in time the latter became known as Beekman's Swamp. In 1677, the slaughter-houses, banished from the city by order of Governor Andros, settled here; and here, a little later, came the tanners from Maiden Lane. Their successors remain to

Kripple=
bush

The
Swamp

this day, and the "Swamp" is still the centre for the wholesale leather trade of the city. These industries, naturally, did not tend to make the spot attractive, and, although six ship-yards flourished near Peck Slip in 1728, the entire marsh was sold in 1735 for one hundred pounds. Slowly the tide of life crept up the eastern shore, and, by 1767, the population of the district had so increased that a Lutheran church was built at the head of the marsh, on the corner of Frankfort and King George (now North William) Streets. This low stone edifice was always known as the "Swamp Church." Within its walls minister and people read the words of the "voice crying in the wilderness": "Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low." And, close on the heels of prophecy, came a literal local fulfilment; for pick and shovel were soon assaulting nature's surrounding earthworks, and the spoils of their warfare were poured into the ooze of the morass below. The actual site of Mr. Beekman's orchard is many feet in the air above the Beekman Street of to-day, and the "tangled briers" of Kripple-bush lie deep beneath the stones of Ferry Street.

To anyone but a Dutchman—who always preferred a ditch to a lake—there was no more beautiful spot on the lower island than the

site of The Collect, or Fresh Water Pond, the largest body of water south of the Harlem River. It covered the territory now bounded by Baxter, White, Elm, Duane, and Park Streets. This clear and sparkling pond was fed by large springs of great reputed purity. Its depth is uncertain, the records ranging from forty to seventy feet, but it was undoubtedly very deep, and was currently reported to be bottomless. Other stranger rumors were rife concerning it. It was said to be the abode of hideous and terrible sea-monsters, which were seen, at intervals, by solitary individuals, and which, on one occasion, during the Revolution, seized a Hessian trooper and carried him off to their subaqueous lair. Tradition's younger and more matter-of-fact sister, history, remarks that "from time to time persons who had drunk too deeply fell from its banks and some of them were drowned." Viewed in this side light, it seems highly probable that the tremendous monsters were of the delirium tremendous variety.

The
Collect

The Indians appreciated the natural advantages of the situation, and their wigwams dotted the groves upon the shores of this lake for many years before Peter Minuit arrived in 1626 and purchased the entire island at the rate of ten acres for a cent. They were a peaceful agricultural people, these Manhatoes,

The
Mandatoes

extensive cultivators of peas and beans, corn and pumpkins. To them we owe the knowledge and name of *sickquatash*, or succotash; and such ample provision did they make for the preparation of this dainty that Hudson, on his first visit to these shores, saw, at one of their villages, a quantity of corn and beans "sufficient to fill three ships." They knew also the value of the oyster. Often their canoes, laden with this spoil of the bay, returned to the lake through the stream connecting it with the North River, and were beached upon its western shore. Large quantities of these oysters were preserved, as stores for the winter, by the women, who opened the shells and strung the juicy morsels on long withes, to be dried in the sun. So great was this industry that the western shore became covered with empty shells, which led the Dutch—whose geographical appellations were usually descriptive, rather than commemorative—to call the place *Kalch Hoek*, or Shell Point. The name of Collect, later applied to the pond itself, is probably a corruption of this word.

Near its shores, late in the autumn of 1626, three negro servants of the Governor murdered and robbed a Weekquaesgeek Indian, who had come from Westchester to sell beaver skins to the Dutch. The deed was witnessed by an Indian boy, a nephew of the murdered man, and long years after, when the youth

had grown to manhood, he fulfilled his vow of vengeance and satisfied his ideas of justice by murdering an inoffensive trader not far from the scene of the former tragedy.

In 1661, the meadows near the Fresh Water, which had previously been used as a common for the pasturing of all sorts and conditions of cattle, were fenced in and reserved for the use of the bovine aristocracy of the city. Gabriel Carpesy was employed as herdsman, and for many years he drove his charges back and forth between the fields and the city. Like his celestial namesake, he carried a trumpet, which he blew "in the morning" at the gates of his clients, who were expected to have their cows in readiness to join the herd ; and in the evening, as the procession returned from the green pastures and still waters, a blast of the familiar horn announced to each owner that his particular Grietje or Katrina was at the gate, awaiting admittance.

The pond was known as a famous fishing-ground from the first, and the drain upon its piscatory resources became so great that, in 1734, a law was passed prohibiting the use of a net in its waters, and imposing a fine upon any person catching fish "by any other manner than that of angling." The marshes on the east were the home of the snipe, and we are told that sportsmen visiting this locality generally returned with "a large quantity of fly-about."

Cattle,
Fish, and
Game

The
Little
Collect

On the hill, which rose to the west, was the negro burying-ground, and at its foot, close to the water, criminals were publicly executed. Here, in 1741, were hung twenty of the actual or suspected participants in the plotted uprising of the slaves and massacre of the whites. The sloping hillside formed a natural amphitheatre, where great crowds were wont to gather from time to time, now to witness a hanging, and again to watch the skating. For in winter the Collect made a fine skating-park, and the ice was thronged with the young people of the town. Here William IV., the "Sailor King," amused himself by throwing coins for the skaters to chase ; and so great was his admiration of the speed and dexterity exhibited, that he forthwith put on skates himself, and, after many a royal tumble, mastered the gentle art.

South of the Fresh Water Pond, and separated from it by a strip of ground high enough to be dry, lay a small marshy lake known as the Little Collect. Just east of this, at the present intersection of Pearl and Park Streets, was a large tan-yard, and another was located on the shore of the greater pond, where Worth and Elm Streets now cross. Upon the strip of ground between the two ponds stood the City Magazine, or Powder House. The road which led to it from Broadway was called Magazine Street ; and on the western side of

Broadway, directly opposite the head of this street, the city hospital was built on a five-acre lot, occupying the very summit of the hill, and purchased from the Rutgers estate.

John
Fitch's
Steam-
boat

In the summer of 1796, seven years before Fulton's first experiments, and eleven years before the success of the *Clermont*, John Fitch sailed a steamboat upon the Collect. The vessel was a ship's yawl, eighteen feet long and six feet beam, with square stern and round bows, experimentally fitted with a screw propeller. A ten- or twelve-gallon iron pot served for a boiler. The little craft made the circuit of the pond several times, at the rate of about six miles an hour. Many spectators were present. Among them were Nicholas Roosevelt, Chancellor Livingston, John Stevens, and others who were deeply interested in the possibilities of the steam-engine. A model of Fitch's boat is owned by the New York Historical Society, but the original, with a part of its machinery, was abandoned and left upon the shore of the pond. Piece by piece the woodwork was carried off for fuel.

Between 1786 and 1796, the population of the city nearly doubled. Streets were laid out to Canal Street, and builders were busy even farther north. Early in this season of prosperity a few shrewd individuals foresaw that the growth of the city would soon enfold the Collect and its surroundings. Efforts were

Schemes
of
Develop-
ment

made to form a syndicate to buy up the land around it, improve the lake, lay out a park upon its shores, and thus enhance the value of the remaining property, which was to be sold for building-lots. But capitalists did not take kindly to the proposition, considering that the locality was much too remote to make the enterprise promising. The owners of the land also looked upon the scheme as visionary, and gave no support to the movement, which was finally abandoned. To-day, there are few areas in all Christendom more densely populated than this "remote" region.

In 1790, the city authorities took up the matter, and we find in the records of the Common Council the following entry :

"Ordered. A Committee to cause a survey to be made of the ancient bounds of the Fresh Water Pond and report the same to the Board."

And, later :

"The Committee appointed delivered a survey for the several streets in the vicinity of Fresh Water, which was ordered to be filed."

The following year the corporation purchased the interests of the heirs of Anthony Rutgers, for one hundred and fifty pounds sterling.

In 1793, the Council ordered another survey of "the land and meadows at and about the

Fresh Water Pond, with the streets which may be necessary marked thereon."

Soon after this, another plan for the preservation of the Collect and the improvement of the surrounding territory was proposed. This project provided for the construction of a navigable canal from the East River to the Hudson, passing directly through the pond and converting it into an inland harbor or basin. The idea met with considerable favor, but before the money needed for the work had been raised, the dumping of rubbish and offal into the Collect had begun. The trees which were once its glory were cut down for firewood ; the beautiful shores were disfigured with piles of refuse, often of the most objectionable character ; and its clear waters became turbid and offensive. So serious a nuisance was created, that, in 1805, the Council declared the condition of the pond to be "dangerous to the public health," and ordered that it be drained and filled in with clean earth. The filling of the Little Collect was completed soon, and Magazine Street was extended to meet Pearl Street, at first as a muddy lane. But before long the road became so firm and dry that houses were erected on either side, and, in 1807, the Scotch Presbyterians built their church upon it.

In 1808, before the filling in of the large pond was completed, an attempt was made to excavate the accumulation of decomposed vege-

The
Filling
in of
the
Collect

The
Old
Wreck
Brook

table matter, resembling peat, which lay in a thick bed over the entire bottom. This material formed an indifferent fuel when dry, and it was hoped that its recovery would prove remunerative ; but after a short trial the project was abandoned and the work of filling in was resumed. Gradually, in ever narrowing circles, structures of brick and mortar appeared—unfit monuments, on the graves of the pleasant places below ; and in 1838, over the spot where the fish leaped and the waters laughed beneath the bows of the Indian's canoe, there arose, in gloomy pile, the Halls of Justice—The Tombs, wherein Freedom and Joy, sacrificed to Crime, are daily buried.

But the obliteration of the Collect is not to be regretted. In such a location, the pond, had it been preserved, would inevitably have become a receptacle for filth, a cause of much desultory disease, and a possible source of devastating pestilence,—a greater menace to the community than the powder magazine which formerly stood on the little tongue of land jutting into its waters.

The eastern outlet of the Collect Pond was through a small stream called the Old Kill or, later, the Old Wreck Brook, which made its way to the East River, practically on the line of the present Roosevelt Street, through a

swampy valley known as Wolfert's Marsh. At its mouth there stood, in 1664, a mill which was already called "old," and here in that year, at eight o'clock on Monday morning, September 8th, the gracious conqueror, Nicolls, returned to the sore-hearted Stuyvesant the duly ratified copy of the articles of capitulation, which turned New Amsterdam into New York without changing the municipal machinery or infringing the rights of the humblest citizen.

To the south of the valley, the ground rose so abruptly that the Boston High Road, which followed the line of Chatham Street (now Park Row), curved to the east as far as William Street and back again, to avoid the steep descent.

Close by the brook, on the highway (near the intersection of the present Park Row and Pearl Street), was the great spring called the Tea Water Pump. It was undoubtedly supplied from the same sources that fed the Collect Pond, and, until 1840, its water was considered the best on the island. In fact no other good water could be had, save from the well at the fort ; for the supply from the public wells was so brackish that the horses of strangers visiting the city refused to drink of it. As a consequence, the Tea Water was in universal demand, and a large number of carts were regularly employed in distributing

The Tea
Water
Pump

The
Kissing
Bridge

it, in casks, throughout the city. So great was this industry that, in 1796, complaints were made that the water carts, awaiting opportunity to fill their barrels at the pump, obstructed Chatham Street ; and, to remedy this evil, the spout of the pump was raised some two feet and extended, so as to discharge the water at the outer edge of the walk and allow pedestrians to pass under it without inconvenience. We are told that, in 1798,

“the average quantity drawn daily from this remarkable well, about 20 feet deep and 4 feet in diameter, is 110 hogsheads of 130 gallons each. In some hot summer days, 216 hogsheads have been drawn from it, and, what is very singular, there are never more or less than 3 feet of water in the well.”

In an old advertisement, offering for lease a house on Reade Street, the proximity of the Tea Water Pump is emphasized as one of the special advantages of the premises.

Passing this much valued spring, the High Road crossed the Old Kill by the famous Kissing Bridge, an institution so appreciated by the young men—and possibly by the young women—of the earlier times, that at several other bridges on the island, formerly free, it became customary to collect toll in like manner. But this was the first of its kind. Of it the Reverend Mr. Burnaby, an English clergyman travelling in this country a century and a

half ago, wrote in his diary : "Just before you enter the town there is a little bridge, commonly called the Kissing Bridge, where it is customary, before passing beyond, to salute the lady who is your companion." Probably the worthy priest, thirsting for knowledge,—or something else,—forced himself to conform to the custom, for he naïvely remarks that he found it "curious, yet not displeasing." We shall hear more of these amatory adjuncts of the civilization of the day as we pursue our journey up the island.

This bridge marked the end of the town from 1755 until the close of the Revolution, and some of the municipal ordinances refer to it as a boundary.

Just north of the bridge the road ascended another hill, so steep that a circuitous route was necessary, and the loop formed in the effort to secure a better grade still exists as Chatham Square. On the hillside, close to the road, stood Wolfert Webber's tavern, for a long time the farthest outlying dwelling on the eastern side. To its right lay the sparkling waters of the Collect, and at its foot the Old Kill danced its way under the Kissing Bridge and through the meadows of the valley which long bore the name of the enterprising and hospitable Wolfert. Beyond it stood the windmill, built by one Hartogvelt, in 1662, for Jan DeWitt, the miller ; and behind the

Wolfert's
Valley

Western
Outlet
of the
Collect

mill arose the hills which shut out the view of the Kripple-bush. It was a fair prospect, but it had its disadvantages; for we find that, when Anthony Rutgers owned the property, he petitioned the King for a better title, so that he might be able to sell the land to some one who would drain it, "because the inhabitants lost one third of their time by sickness."

Behind Wolfert's tavern, on the west side of Bowery Lane near the present Pell Street, there stood, in 1767, the small, two-story frame building where Charlotte Temple met her tragic fate.

The valley was filled early in the present century.

The western outlet of the Collect was a small stream which left the pond at its northern end and flowed, nearly on the line of the present Canal Street, to the Hudson. East of the Church Street of to-day, its course lay through a low, but rather narrow marshy valley, between rolling land, topped here and there with conical sand-hills, on the north, and the *Kalch Hoek*, which arose to a considerable elevation on the south. Beyond this hill, and following the curve of its base, there spread the broad pasture land, swamps, and salt marshes of the Lispenard Meadows, which extended to the shore line (just beyond Greenwich Street) and from Duane Street on

the south to Spring Street on the north. Through these meadows the stream from the Collect flowed sluggishly, spreading out over the low land, but maintaining enough of a channel to permit the passage of small boats from the river to the pond. A little brook, draining another swampy valley which lay at the foot of the western slope of *Kalch Hoek*, followed, substantially, the line of West Broadway from Reade Street, and entered the larger stream nearly at a right angle. On the northern side a tiny rivulet trickled down from a fine spring which gave the name of Spring Street to the road which passed it, leading to Broadway.

In seasons of heavy rains almost the whole district was flooded, and in the winter acres of its surface were traversed by skaters, who resorted thither by hundreds when the Collect had been made unfit for this use. During the dry season, however, this region furnished much valuable pasture land. The boys of the period fished in the creeks, or, regardless of brambles, waded through the swamps in search of bull-frogs and water-snakes—joint tenants with the snipe and woodcock, whose cousins inhabited the Jersey shore; while venturesome girls occasionally risked torn frocks and wet feet in gathering berries or cattails.

In its primitive condition, however, the val-

The
Lispnard
Meadows

**Anthony
Rutgers's
Petition**

ley was never particularly attractive. The greater part of it was included in the original grant to Roelof Janssen, which, after the marriage of his widow, Annetje Jans, to the Reverend Everardus Bogardus, was known as the Dominie's Bouwerie. Later, the property was swallowed up in the Duke's Farm, which became successively the King's Farm, the Queen's Farm, and, finally, by the grant of Queen Anne, the Church Farm. At no time during all this period was the land a profitable property. It was leased often for merely nominal rentals, but one tenant after another abandoned it. In its pestilential quagmires cattle were lost so often that the Council caused it to be fenced off; and we are told that, where Grand and Greene Streets now intersect, a man, who had mistaken his way in the dark, walked into deep water and was drowned. The Lutheran Church was offered, at one time, a tract of six acres near the present corner of Broadway and Canal Street, which the Trustees deemed "inexpedient to accept as a gift, since the land was not worth fencing in."

The first noteworthy attempt to improve the meadows was made soon after 1730, when Anthony Rutgers, wishing to benefit the public in general and himself in particular, offered to clear and drain the swamps on condition that the land be given to him. His

petition to the King and Council contains the following description of prevailing conditions :

Rutgers's
Petition
Granted

" The said swamp is constantly filled with standing water, for which there is no natural vent, and being covered with bushes and small trees is by the stagnation and rottenness of it become exceedingly dangerous and of fatal consequence to all the inhabitants of the north part of the city bordering near the same, they being subject to very many diseases and distempers, which by all physicians and by long experience are imputed to the unwholesome vapours arising thereby ; and as the said swamp is upon a level with the waters of Hudson and the South [East] rivers, no person has ever yet attempted to clear the same, nor ever can under a grant thereof which is to expire with the next new Governor ; for the expense of clearing the same will be so great, and the length of time in doing the same such that it never will be attempted, but by a grantee of the fee simple thereof ; and as the same can be of no benefit until it is cleared, so no person has hitherto accepted a grant of the said land, but the same hath lain and still remains unimproved and uncultivated, to the great prejudice and annoyance of the adjacent farms, particularly to a farm of your petitioner's adjoining thereto, which your petitioner, after having been at a great charge and expense in settling, cannot prevail on any tenant to take the same, or get any servants to continue there for any time while the said swamp remains in its present state."

Accompanying the petition, were opinions from several physicians, stating, in substance, that the marshes were the cause of much sickness, and that their drainage would result in great sanitary benefit to the community. The Council granted his request and gave him a

**Improve-
ment
of the
Canal**

title to the swamp, covering about seventy acres, for "a moderate quit-rent," on condition that he should "clear and drain it within a year."

At this time Leonard Lispenard was the lessee, from Trinity Parish, of that portion of the Church Farm which lay between the river and the wet valley now covered by West Broadway, and extended from the neighborhood of Reade Street to the wide swamp through which the stream from the Collect lazily flowed. We can make up our minds, each to his own liking, as to whether or not Mr. Lispenard foresaw a way in which he could secure permanent possession of this property without the annoyance of paying for it. But this much is certain : that, just about the time when a considerable part of the land had been cleared, drained, and converted into good pasture, he made himself very agreeable to neighbor Rutgers and to his pretty daughter, and finally married the latter. About 1750, the enterprising and industrious Anthony died, and the Meadows became the property of Mr. and Mrs. Lispenard, and were known thereafter as the Lispenard Meadows.

Although Rutgers's labors had reclaimed a large part of the wet territory, the low land lying on each side of the stream from the Collect remained unimproved until 1796, when, in furtherance of the long discussed project

for constructing a navigable canal from the Hudson to the East River, a committee, appointed by the Council, secured from the owners of the land the right to cut a channel forty feet wide, and to lay out a street thirty feet wide on each side of it. Nothing further was done at this time. In the city records of 1798 appears the following entry:

“A letter from the Health Commissioners read, representing that the swamp or meadow between the Fresh Water Pond and Hudson River is overflowed with standing water, and requires immediate measures for draining it. Ordered that it be attended to.”

When the Collect became a dumping-ground, the projected canal was abandoned; and about the beginning of the present century the brook was straightened, deepened and planked, making a channel about ten feet wide in a street one hundred feet in width. About the same time a stone bridge, with a single central arch, was built across the stream at Broadway. This bridge was ten feet seven inches above the surface of the meadow, and was approached by a narrow embankment from either side. In 1808, it marked the city boundary, and a milestone which stood at its southern end bore the legend, “2 Miles from the Battery.” Near Church Street, a single plank, laid across the canal, connected the two ends of a well-beaten foot-path, which

St. John's
Chapel

**St. John's
Park**

was used as a short cut by the inhabitants of Greenwich in going to and from the city. At a later date bridges were built at Church Street and at other points.

In 1807, the Vestry of Trinity Church began the erection of St. John's Chapel, on Varick Street, between Beach and Laight. A less attractive location could hardly have been found. It was at the junction of the West Broadway and the Canal Street swamps, and the outlook was over a dreary waste of rushes and brambles, unshaded by a single large tree. The building itself was of stone, a really elegant structure, which cost about two hundred thousand dollars. Having completed the chapel, the Vestry of Trinity turned their attention to the improvement of the neighborhood, and laid out as a park the whole block bounded by Varick, Beach, Hudson, and Laight Streets, which was called Hudson Square or St. John's Park. It was carefully graded, planted, and fenced in; and "old Cisco," a former slave, who was made its keeper, cared for it with such fidelity that the locality soon became one of the most attractive parts of the city. Substantial brick houses arose around it, the homes of many of the best citizens, and the value of property in the vicinity rapidly increased. Wells were dug and pumps erected at the corners. At Laight and Varick Streets, the Presbyterians built a little

church, which appeared so plain and small beside the beautiful stone pile that overshadowed it, that it was dubbed "St. John's Kitchen." Here the Reverend Dr. Samuel H. Coxe, father of the late Bishop Coxe, of Buffalo, thundered his anathemas against slavery, to the discomfort of several of his most influential parishioners. The gates of the Park were kept locked, to prevent the intrusion of strangers, but each resident of the square had his own key, and enjoyed its privileges with certainty that he would meet no objectionable person inside its limits. Facing this park lived the families of Alexander Hamilton, General Schuyler and General Morton, the Aymars, Drakes, Coits, Delafields, and others of equal fame; and here lived many of their descendants until the Hudson River Railroad Company tore down the protecting fence, invaded the sacred precincts with axe and shovel, and blotted St. John's Park out of existence with four acres of freight station. Fashion fled precipitately. Only John Ericsson, the builder of the *Monitor*, remained. He continued in his old home until his death, which occurred not very long ago.

Little by little, the whole wet area of the Lisenard Meadows was drained, filled and built upon.

Many public wells were dug in this vicinity, but it is difficult to locate them. We know

Now a
Freight
Station

Reclama-
tion
of the
Swamp

of one on Greenwich Street, between Canal and Watts Streets, and of another at North Moore and Greenwich Streets. A third, at Church and Thomas Streets, on the slope of the *Kalch Hoek*, still exists, and is used for watering horses ; but the original supply from the soil has been shut out and the well converted into a cistern fed with Croton water.

The open channel in Canal Street gave place to a sewer, fourteen feet wide and six feet high, with flat bottom and sides of stone and with arch of brick, which still carries a copious flow of water from the ancient springs that fed the almost forgotten Fresh Water Pond. The work of filling the swamps and raising the grade of this district was tedious and costly, for the mire was so deep and soft that the heavier filling material sank to the bottom as fast as it was poured in. In some places, new ground to the depth of forty feet was made before the surface became dry. In sinking a well at Wooster and Grand Streets, this was found to be the thickness of the filling at that point. But eventually the brooks and meadows, and the hills which bounded them, alike disappeared. Occasional complaints of wet cellars, and a high death rate from pulmonary and diarrheal diseases, alone remain to recall the original conditions.

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